

REPOSITIONING TEACHER EDUCATION FOR THE CHALLENGES OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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Abstract

There is a general consensus among educationists on the fact that the extent to which the National objectives of Education can be achieved is strongly dependent on the efficiency of the teacher. On the basis of the above exposition, the paper examines the concept- of Teacher education, its objectives and the problems militating against a viable Teacher education in Nigeria. In addition, the paper also examines how teacher Education can be repositioned for the challenges of the new millennium.

Introduction

Teacher Education is a subject matter which constantly attracts the attention of educationists, school administrators and well meaning Nigerians in the recent past. This is due to the fact that, teachers are the ones who interpret the aims, goals and programmes of education to ensure that learners are educated in the direction of National objectives of education of any given country.

Nigeria aspires to be the giant of Africa economically, socially, politically and educationally. This great aspiration may be a wishful thinking if there is no strong educational system with an equally strong teaching force. Adesina (T981) reiterated that teacher education is the gateway for any meaningful national development, and that it can also be described as the sole producer of all other professionals who are specially trained to manage the various sectors of nation's economy. Teacher education according to Ukeje (1995), if well positioned could be a great asset to the nation in all ramifications. The importance of teacher education to a virile national development cannot be overemphasized in view of the fact that no nation can rise above the level of its teachers.

Furthermore, Hanson (1975), asserted that, teacher education revolution is imperative, in view of the fact that the destiny of our children and generation unborn depends so much on a viable teacher education programme. In a nutshell, the type of teacher education expected in Nigeria in the new millennium is the one that will equip the teacher with the required knowledge, skills, competences and morals. These will enable the teacher to be able to face the challenges of the shrinking labour market and unemployment situations. It is on the basis of the above expositions that the paper examines how teacher education can be repositioned to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The Concept of Teacher Education and its Objectives

Discussing the teacher as the center of the educational system, Ukeje (1995), affirms that, no education can rise above the level of its teacher, and that no country can rise above its teachers. On the basis of the above statement, teacher education according to Ukeje (1995), is that type of education designed for a would-be-teacher, or a type of education a would-be-teacher has to acquire. This presupposes that teacher education is a process of preparing or developing individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills that would enable them to effectively direct and influence learning situations.

Furthermore, teacher education is therefore viewed in this context as that which is capable of achieving the national objectives is contained in the *National Policy on Education* (2004). Again, teacher education programme is expected to produce teachers well equipped with necessary skills for the effective performance of their duties.

In order to achieve qualitative teacher education in Nigeria, the Federal Government in the *National Policy on Education* (2004), set the following objectives against which it has to be assessed.

- a. To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system.
- b. To encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
- c. To help teacher to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance

- their commitment to national objectives.
- d. To provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation, and
 - e. To enhance teacher's commitment to the teaching profession.

It is observable that, the objectives of teacher education in Nigeria are very lofty and laudable in terms of policy statement, but the effective implementation of these objectives is saddled with numerous national problems which militate against the potentials of teacher education in meeting the challenges of the 21st century in Nigeria.

The Problems of Teacher education in Nigeria

Every educational system at every level depends heavily on teachers for the execution of its educational programmes. Teacher education in Nigeria is saddled with numerous problems. The outcome of a study carried out by Iyanga (1990), on the problems of teacher education in Nigeria revealed that, poor funding constitutes a great threat to teacher education in Nigeria. According to him, adequate funding is necessary to enable the authorities concerned pay teachers salaries and other allowances in good time. Adequate funding is also required to purchase teaching instructions, and expansion of school structures. Investment in educational researches is also paramount to effective teacher preparation. Therefore, adequate funding is necessary for the attainment of teacher education objectives in Nigeria.

Asiwaju (1992), in a study carried out on the problems of teacher education in Nigeria identified inadequate supply of educational resources as deficiency to teacher preparation. According to the outcome of his study, most teacher education institutions are not properly equipped in terms of contemporary textbooks, instructional technology equipment, computer machines, classroom facilities and other important educational facilities required for effective teacher preparation programmes. It should be noted that adequate supply of teaching facilities is necessary for effective teacher preparation in Nigeria.

Another study carried out by Ukeje (1995), on the problem of teacher education in Nigeria is matching quantity with quality. There are many teacher training institutions in Nigeria, and the various expansions have resulted in accelerated training programmes for teachers. With the new policy of National Certificate in Education (NCE) becoming the minimum teaching qualification in the country, we now have long distance training programmes and part-time long vacation programme-; for teachers, some of which last for few years. As the number of teachers increases, the issue of quality and competence in the training of teachers becomes problematic. Other problems of teacher education in Nigeria include poor entry qualification, poor conditions of service, retention of teachers and inability of the relevant authority to professionalize teaching as a profession. These problems should be effectively tackled in order to make teacher education relevant to the challenges of the new millennium.

Repositioning Teacher Education for the Challenges of the New Millennium

Considering the various problems facing teacher education in Nigeria, there is a need for a new orientation towards the purpose and process of teacher education. The curriculum of teacher education should change with time and the needs of the nation within the global perspectives. For instance, a lot of emphasis should be placed on science, technology and computer education. These areas of knowledge should be given priority in the teacher training and retraining programmes.

Secondly, there should be some major restructuring training programmes in the teacher education that must focus particular attention on the emerging social changes in the nature of teaching strategies, shrinking labour market, the astronomical rise in unemployment and differences in learning expectations. This presupposes that in the assessment of teachers for certification, particular attention should be given to measuring knowledge and skills that are needed for the whole range of teaching situation which a beginning teacher is expected to be exposed to, and not just a single teaching practice. This means that prospective teachers should be assessed on the job during internship just like their counterparts in medicine.

Thirdly, to cope with the demand for competent teachers in Nigeria, teacher education needs adequate funding and sufficient supply of educational resources. The production of sufficient knowledgeable, committed and properly motivated teachers in a period of extreme materialism and unprecedented rapid educational expansion could be a serious problem. Fagbolu (1990) opined that, it is not easy to notice the effects of poor teaching immediately. But in the final analysis the mistakes of the teacher are devastating in effect to the future of any nation than those of any known professional.

Furthermore, the social status of the teacher needs special attention by all governments of the federation because teachers are the builders of tomorrow. The conditions of service, salaries and the general welfare packages for teachers should be reviewed and upgraded from time to time. In view of the professional status of the teachers, they should be encouraged to attend seminars, conferences and workshops to update their knowledge, skills and competences required for effective performance of their jobs.

Similarly, professionalization of teaching is equally important for teacher education to be able to meet the complex challenges of the new millennium. According to Wise (2000), there is a general belief that anyone can teach anything and that teaching is not a difficult job after all. Professionalization of teaching will bring about a situation in which only those teachers who are qualified are employed to teach in Nigeria schools.

Above all, the supervisory agencies to teacher education such as National Teacher Institute (NTI), Teacher Registration Council (TRC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Nigeria University Commission (NUC), National Commission for Polytechnics (NCP), should periodically ensure through vigorous academic accreditation exercises that teacher education in Nigeria is ran in such a way that academic excellence is not compromised.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teacher education is very important because its benefits to teaching are too numerous. Teacher education also constitutes a powerful tool for nation building socially, politically and economically. Therefore, it should be given the necessary attention it deserves to enable it cope with the challenges of the new millennium.

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